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SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FINNISH AMBASSADOR TO SAUDI  
ARABIA

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller, for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On March 29, CG received a courtesy visit from Finnish Ambassador Martti Isoaro. Also present was Jeddah Pol/Econ Chief. The Ambassador expressed the hope that the U.S. and Finnish missions could cooperate in the Western Province and described the two major objectives of his embassy in Saudi Arabia, promotion of trade and protection of Finish citizens, including a small contingent of Muslims who traveled on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. The Ambassador also spoke about a meeting with the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference who expressed interest in increasing that organization's engagement in international affairs on behalf of the Islamic community of nations.

#### THE FINNISH MISSION TO SAUDI ARABIA

¶2. (C) On March 29, Finnish Ambassador Martti Isoaro discussed the objectives of his mission in Saudi Arabia with the Consul General and Pol/Econ Chief. Ambassador Isoaro has been in Saudi Arabia for approximately nine months. The Finnish Embassy is of very modest size, numbering only five officers, including the Ambassador. Finland does not maintain a consulate in Jeddah; however, efforts to promote trade dictate that the Ambassador or his staff travel to Jeddah frequently.

#### OIC SEEKING LARGER ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

¶3. (C) During the meeting, Ambassador Isoaro informed CG that while in Jeddah, he had meet with the Secretary General of the OIC. He stated that Secretary General Ihsanoglu had expressed a desire to increase the organization's role in international affairs, as a representative of the Islamic community. CG replied that the OIC, under Ihsanoglu, was striving to take a larger role, but that the organization appeared to still lack decisive influence with the Islamic populace.

#### FINLAND LOOKS TO REGENERATE TRADE RELATIONSHIP

¶4. (C) A major objective of the Finnish Embassy is to revive Finnish trade in Saudi Arabia to take advantage of the rapidly growing economy and the structural changes brought about by Saudi Arabia's entry into the WTO. The Ambassador related that during the boom years before the turn of the

century, as many as 2,000 Finns had lived in Saudi Arabia. As major development projects ended the number diminished and dropped drastically in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the last few years. At the present time there are only about 100 Finns in the Kingdom.

15. (C) The Ambassador is now working to reverse this decline. He hopes to build on the reputation of leading Finnish companies, particularly in the areas of construction and industrial products. An important image-maker for Finnish industry is Nokia which has a dominant portion of the market for mobile phones. He also has great hopes for a Finnish elevator manufacturer that had once been active in the Kingdom. Pol/Econ Chief offered a short briefing on the economy in Jeddah and advised him of potential resources, such as the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI).

#### FINNISH HAJJIS

16. (C) Isoaro also revealed that Finland sends approximately 200 pilgrims to the Kingdom on hajj each year. The Finnish Muslim community is very small, consisting primarily of "long-established Tartars" and recent Somali "refugees--whether economic or political, it is hard to say." The first group was expelled from their homeland in western Asia by the Soviet Government during the mass population removals in the 1930's and '40's. The Somalis were accepted by the Finnish Government as refugees from their country's civil war in the 1990's.

Gfoeller